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E.O. 12958: N/A
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SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

1. Mideast

Key stories in the media:

All Israeli media led with pre-election stories on the movement of key figures between political parties and on public opinion polls. The Jerusalem Post reports that Professor Uriel Reichman, Shinui founder, decided to join PM Sharon's Kadima party, that Foreign Minister Silvan Shalom's campaign for Likud leader was off to a slow start yesterday, and that former prime minister and Labor chairman Shimon Peres is expected to formally announce his decision today to leave the Labor Party after 61 years in the party and its forerunners and not to run for re-election to the Knesset after a record 46 years in the parliament. The Post also reported that Peres would announce that he has accepted an offer from Sharon to serve as a minister in charge of peace talks with the Palestinians and developing the Negev and the Galilee. Peres will not join Kadima, but he will endorse Sharon.

In a related report, the Post adds that after attracting 19 MKs to his new Kadima party, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon shifted his attention on Tuesday to seeking support from mayors from across the country. Seventy-two mayors affiliated with Likud, Labor, the National Union, Arab, Druze and Bedouin parties attended a festive dinner at Sharon's official residence in Jerusalem. Sharon asked the mayors for support in building Kadima into a permanent fixture on the Israeli political scene. "The fact that you came is proof that that the steps we have taken have unprecedented public support from the entire country," Sharon told the mayors. Agriculture Minister Yisrael Katz (Likud) said that Sharon was unfairly taking advantage of the Prime Minister's Office to advance his political party, the Post added. Ha'aretz reports that several mayors and Likud members in attendance said they would work to prevent the election of Binyamin Netanyahu as Likud chairman so that Sharon could form a coalition with his former party should Shalom or Shaul Mofaz be elected Likud leaders. In a related report, several Kadima members were cited as saying yesterday that the new Kadima party is "beginning to look too leftist."

Ma'ariv reports that a poll conducted yesterday among Likud members shows Netanyahu leading with 39%, followed by Mofaz (19%) and Shalom (12%). Ma'ariv and Yedi'ot Aharonot carry the same results of telephone polls (of a representative sample of Israelis) conducted yesterday, showing Likud, Shinui, and Labor falling further, while Kadima is seen gaining. The poll question was: "Were elections held today, for which of the following parties would you vote?" The results are given in Knesset seats, and last week's results are given in brackets: Kadima: 34 (33), Labor: 27 (26), SHAS: 11 (10), Likud: 10 (13), ultra-Orthodox parties: 6 (5), Shinui: 5 (6), Yisrael Beiteinu: 5 (5), Yahad-Meretz: 5 (5), National Union Party: 5 (5), NRP: 4 (3), Arab parties: 8 (9).

Ha'aretz reports that the religious parties stopped deliberations on a potential merger as public opinion

polls they commissioned revealed that a united list would score less votes than if the parties run separately.

The Post reports that the defense establishment presented Prime Minister Ariel Sharon Tuesday with a plan to halt smuggling from the Sinai by building a robust security fence along the Egyptian border. Sharon said he would bring the plan, expected to cost some NIS 1.5 billion, to the cabinet "in the coming weeks." Yedi'ot Aharonot reports that, touring the border area yesterday, PM Sharon was told by security officials that more than 4,000 people illegally entered Israel across the "porous border" last year. Sharon instructed that this must be stopped, saying that there is no difference between criminal and terror-related smuggling.

The Jerusalem Post reports that settler leaders on Tuesday launched an open-ended sit down strike opposite the government compound in Jerusalem to protest the government "neglect" and "obtuseness" in dealing with the thousands of Israeli evacuees. The demonstration got off to a slow start with "a mere dozen participants in the huge white tent" erected opposite the foreign ministry.

The army radio reported that the Supreme Court has decided to allow the extradition of Ze'ev Rosenstein, the Israel Police's number one intelligence target, to the United States. He is suspected of involvement in worldwide drug deals worth tens of millions of dollars. A three-judge panel ruled unanimously that Rosenstein's extradition was the correct course of action and stemmed from the recognition of the US's natural right to defend itself against people who rise up against it. Rosenstein's request to be tried in Israel was rejected.

Ma'ariv reports that last week, three tenders for the construction of new separation fence segments - totaling 71km -- were issued. The tenders are expected to total more than 700 million shekels, and work will be done in 17 different sectors, with tender results expected by the end of December. Work is to begin in January and end around December 2006.

Citing an AP report, The Jerusalem Post reported that the United States acknowledged Tuesday that reports of secret US-run terror prisons have raised an outcry

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among European allies, and said the US will account for its actions. Without confirming that any CIA detention sites exist in Europe, a State Department spokesman said the US has not violated either its own laws or international treaties. "The United States in its actions does not break US law," spokesman Sean McCormack said. "All its actions comply with the (US) Constitution and we abide by our international obligations.

The Jerusalem Post reported that, speaking at a November 24 rally in Damascus, white supremacist and former US State Representative from Louisiana David Duke called the US a land "occupied" by Zionists. "The Zionists occupy most of the American media and now control much of American government. It is not just the West Bank of Palestine, it is not just the Golan Heights that are occupied by the Zionists, but Washington DC, and New York, and London, and many other capitals in the world," the former KKK member said. The Jerusalem Post reported that as the United Nations began its annual debate on the Palestinian issue Tuesday, Israeli officials expected less criticism against Israel than in former years. Israeli diplomats at the UN have managed to take off the agenda one of the anti-Israeli resolutions and are negotiating a weaker language for other resolutions condemning Israel.

1. Mideast

Summary:

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "In the illegal outposts that the Israeli Government is not dismantling live outlaws who not only seize others' lands, but also cause damage to Palestinian persons and property.. Needless to say that no government authority is doing anything to change this reality." Senior military affairs analyst Reuven Pedatzur writes in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "If we were to accept the conclusions of the analysis presented by the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies, Israel's strategic situation has never been better.. If things are so good, why does Israel keep investing so many resources in security? This is from where much money can be taken to solve much of Israel's poverty problems, that make the defense minister lose sleep."

Block Quotes:

I. "Who Will Deal With Choppers Of Trees?"

Independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz editorialized: "In the illegal outposts that the Israeli Government is not dismantling live outlaws who not only seize others' lands, but also cause damage to Palestinian persons and property, assuming that the law cannot touch them. The olive picking season has in recent years turned into fun season for some of the outpost dwellers and the damage they cause - undisturbed - to Palestinian olive plantations is inconceivable.. The Samaria and Judea District police say 672 cases were opened against Israelis who attacked Palestinians, but this is no indication of results. Most of the cases are closed with time, investigations are not conducted seriously, the police are not investing resources in the district, the police stations are inside settlements and the Palestinians are afraid to come there and report, and the police officers are themselves settlers. Needless to say that no government authority is doing anything to change this reality."

II. "Our Situation is Better Than Ever"

Senior military affairs analyst Reuven Pedatzur writes in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "If we were to accept the conclusions of the analysis presented by the Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies last week, Israel's strategic situation has never been better.. As its power of deterrence grew, Israel faces no real danger. The threat of terror indeed remained, but it poses no existential threat. The future potentially holds an Iranian nuclear threat, but it seems that it will be years before it becomes real. Syria is weaker and isolated., relations with Egypt improved., the peace accord with Jordan is stable., the occupation of Iraq completely eliminated the age-long threat of the eastern front., the disengagement started a positive era in Israel's relations with Europe., the strategic relations with the United States are better than ever, and the Bush administration. is actually giving Israel a free reign in its war against terror. Even the developments in the PA territories helped improve Israel's security situation.. If things are so good, why does Israel keep investing so many resources in security, much more than all of its neighbors? The Jaffee Center report does not ask that.. The situation should have led to a decision on substantial cuts in the security budget and the formulation of a new security concept that would cost much less than the current one. Regrettably, this is not happening, and the defense minister is advised to read the report to remind himself of things he probably knows well. This is from where a lot of money can be taken to solve much of Israel's poverty problems, which make the defense minister lose sleep."

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